PETRARCH'S CORONATION ORATION*

THE oration delivered by Petrarch on the occasion of his coronation on 8 April 1341 illuminates more clearly than does any other existing document the gradual transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. With all its mingling of elements old and new it is the first manifesto of the Renaissance. Yet it is almost

* Although, for obvious reasons, *PMLA* does not publish translations, and normally will not even consider them for publication, the importance and inaccessibility of this document prompted the Editorial Committee to make an exception to its long-standing policy. With Professor Wilkins, who originally prepared the translation for class use, it believes that Petrarch's oration should be made available to scholars in general.—*Ed.*

unknown. The Latin text is available only in the *Scritti inediti di Francesco Petrarca* edited by Attilio Hortis (Trieste, 1874). A French translation by Victor Develay, which I have found useful, appeared in *Le Livre*, VI (1885), 278–288. No English translation has appeared hitherto. The present translation follows the Latin text faithfully. The use of the numerals I, II and III to mark the main divisions of the oration is merely editorial.[1]

THE ORATION

Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis
raptat amor.[2]

Today, magnificent and venerable sirs, I must follow in my speech the ways of poetry, and I have therefore taken my text from a poetic source. For the same reason I shall do without those minute distinctions that are usually to be found in theological declamations, and I shall make my speech as brief as possible. Yet I must first invoke the divine favor; and to win this, despite my desire to be brief, I must not fail to offer salutation to the glorious Virgin.

I

Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis
raptat amor.

These words are written in the third book of the *Georgics* of the greatest and most illustrious of all poets. The phrase *me Parnasi deserta per ardua* suggests the difficulty of the task I have set myself[3]—and we should note the force of the several words *Parnasi* and *ardua* and *deserta*. The phrase *dulcis raptat amor* suggests the ardent eagerness of a studious mind—and we should note the force of *amor* in itself, of *dulcis amor*, and of *amor* having the power to urge one upward. This difficulty and this eagerness are closely related, and are dependent each upon the other: for he who undertakes to climb the *ardua deserta Parnasi* must indeed long intensely for that which he seeks to attain; and he who loves to climb is doubtless the better prepared thereby to attain through study that in which his mind delights. For study without longing and without great mental pleasure and delight cannot attain the desired results. This may be gathered from the opinion of the Peripatetic philosophers, as set forth so well by Cicero in the fourth book of the *Tusculans*, and is clear also from the very definition of study as "an assiduous and eager concentration of mind directed with great pleasure toward some particular object": a definition which corresponds to Cicero's definition of philosophy, poetry, and the other arts in the first book of his treatise *On Invention*.

So then, to be brief, as I have promised to be, and as befits my profession, I declare first that the difficulty of the task I have set myself is rendered great by three circumstances: the very nature of the task; the ill fortune that has relentlessly beset me; and the fact that in times like these the minds of men are set upon material things, and are adverse to such studies. Of each of these three circumstances I must now speak briefly.

The inherent difficulty of the poet's task lies in this, that whereas in the other arts one may attain his goal through sheer toil and study, it is far otherwise with the art of poetry, in which nothing can be accomplished unless a certain inner and divinely given energy is in-

[1] The coronation and the oration are discussed in a chapter in my book, *The Making of the "Canzoniere" of Petrarch and Other Petrarchan Studies* (Rome, 1951).

[2] "But a sweet longing urges me upward over the lonely slopes of Parnassus" (Virgil, *Georgics* III.291–292).

[3] That is, the poet's task.

fused in the poet's spirit. Take not my word for this, but Cicero's, who in his oration for Aulus Licinius Archias has this to say of poets: "We have it upon the authority of the most learned men that whereas attainment in other activities depends upon talent, learning, and skill, the poet attains through his very nature, is moved by the energy that is within his mind, and is as it were inspired by a divine inbreathing—so that Ennius fairly calls poets sacred in their own right, since they appear to be commended to us by the possession of a divine gift." In his reference to "the most learned men" Cicero, I believe, was thinking of Marcus Varro, by far the most learned of all the Romans, who is believed to have expressed this very idea in the first book of his treatise *On Poets*. It is in view of this same difficulty that the Satirist says:

Magnae mentis opus, nec de lodice paranda
attonitae, currus et equos faciesque deorum
aspicere et qualis Rutulum confundat Erinys.[4]

Lucan also in his ninth book exclaims: *O sacer et magnus vatum labor.*[5] Does it not seem to you that the inherent difficulty of my task has been established sufficiently and by suitable authorities? With regard to other activities, however, the poet writes, in the first book of his *Georgics: Labor omnia vincit / improbus.*[6] Hence come the foolish efforts of those who to the very end of their lives toil uselessly and ineffectively in verse, as the books on Scholastic Discipline bear witness.

How hard and inexorable fortune has been to me, with what labors she has oppressed me from my youth up, how many blows I have endured from her, God knows, and they also know who have been my close companions. But this I pass over, lest with sorrowful words I hinder the rejoicing of this day. Everyone, to be sure, who has made trial of the poetic task knows what impediments are placed in his way by the bitterness of fortune. Aware of this, and thinking not only of poets in general, but even of Virgil, the very father of poets, the Satirist writes:

Nam si Vergilio puer et tolerabile desset
hospitium, caderent omnes a crinibus hydri,
surda nihil gemeret grave bucina,[7]

and again:

Sed vatem egregium, cui non sit publica vena,
qui nil expositum soleat deducere nec qui
communi feriat carmen triviale moneta,
hunc, qualem nequeo monstrare et sentio tantum,
anxietate carens animus facit, omnis acerbi
impatiens, cupidus silvarum aptusque bibendis
fontibus Aonidum. Neque enim cantare sub antro
Pierio thyrsumve potest contingere maesta
paupertas atque aeris inops, quo nocte dieque
corpus eget.[8]

[4] "It takes a noble mind, not one dismayed by the cost of a coverlet, to behold the chariots, the horses, and the faces of the gods, and such a fury as could confound the Rutulian" (Juvenal, *Satire* VII, 66–68).

[5] "Sacred and great is the task of poets" (*Pharsalia* IX.980).

[6] "Relentless toil overcomes all difficulties" (I.145).

[7] "For if Virgil had had no boy to serve him and no tolerable dwelling, all the snakes would have fallen from her hair, and her trumpet, silent, would have sounded no dread note." These lines follow immediately those quoted above from Juvenal.

[8] "But the good poet, whose line is not commonplace, who does not deal in the reworking of old stuff, nor stamp his songs in a common mint (I cannot show him to you, I can

Of the third difficulty I will say only this, that, as we all read and know, there was a time, there was an age, that was happier for poets, an age when they were held in the highest honor, first in Greece and then in Italy, and especially when Caesar Augustus held imperial sway, under whom there flourished excellent poets, Virgil, Varus,[9] Ovid, Horace, and many others. Of this time the Satirist writes: *Tunc par ingenio pretium, tunc utile multis / pallere et vinum toto nescire Decembri.*[10] But today, as you well know, all this is changed. This is obvious, and needs no proof, so that one may rightly say today what the Satirist, distressed by a change in the times, said long ago:

Frange miser calamum vigilataque proelia dele,
qui facis in parva sublimia carmina cella,
ut dignus venias hederis et imagine macra.
Spes nulla ulterior; didicit iam dives avarus
tantum admirari, tantum laudare disertos,
ut pueri Iunonis avem. Sed defluit aetas
et pelagi patiens et cassidis atque ligonis.
Taedia tunc subeunt animo, tunc seque suamque
Terpsichoren odit facunda et nuda senectus.[11]

These, then, are the three difficulties of which I spoke: the first two show how arduous are the heights of Parnassus which I have set out to climb; the third shows how lonely they are.

Someone then might say: "What is all this, my friend? Have you determined to revive a custom that is beset with inherent difficulty and has long since fallen into desuetude? and this in the face of a hostile and recalcitrant fortune? Whence do you draw such confidence that you would decorate the Roman Capitol with new and unaccustomed laurels? Do you not see what a task you have undertaken in attempting to attain the lonely steeps of Parnassus and the inaccessible grove of the Muses?" Yes, I do see, oh my dear sirs; I do indeed see this, oh Roman citizens, *Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis / raptat amor*, as I said at the outset. For the intensity of my longing is so great that it seems to me sufficient to enable me to overcome all the difficulties that are involved in my present task.

The second portion of my first theme springs from this, that after the reference to the toilsome ascent *per ardua deserta Parnasi* there follows the mention of the effective cause of that ascent: *dulcis raptat amor*. And here it is to be noted that just as the difficulty has been shown to rise, as it were, from three roots, so the disposition of the spirit which is victorious over that difficulty rises also from three roots, which are, first, the honor of the Republic; second, the charm of personal glory; and third, the stimulation of other men to a like endeavor.

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only imagine him) must have a spirit free from anxiety, untouched by any bitterness, eager for the woods, and ready to drink at the fountain of the Muses. For none can sing in the Pierian cave or wield the thyrsus who is oppressed by sad poverty and lacks the coin to meet the body's daily and nightly needs" (VII.53–62).

[9] Petrarch had in mind the Augustan poet Varius, mentioned by Horace and Virgil. His name appears as Varus in some MSS., including Petrarch's own MS. of Virgil.

[10] "Then genius found its due reward; then it was worth while for many to grow pale and to abstain from wine for all December" (VII.96–97).

[11] "Break your pen, poor fellow, and destroy the battles over which you have toiled in the night hours, writing sublime songs in your poor little room, hoping to earn a meagre bust, bedecked with ivy. There is nothing more to hope for: the rich miser has now learned to admire and to praise only the fluent, as boys admire the bird of Juno. The time is past that could endure the sea, the helmet, and the mattock. Weariness overcomes the spirit; and old age, eloquent but naked, hates itself and its own Muse" (VII.27–35).

The honor of the Republic stirs my heart when I recall that in this very city of Rome—the capital of the world, as Cicero calls it—in this very Roman Capitol where we now are gathered, so many and such great poets, having attained to the highest and most illustrious mastery of their art, have received the laurel crown they had deserved, but that now this custom seems rather to have been lost than to have been merely laid aside, and not lost merely, but reduced to a matter of strange legendry, and discontinued for more than twelve hundred years. For we do not read that anyone has been decorated with this honor since the illustrious poet Statius, who flourished in the time of Domitian. I am moved also by the hope that, if God wills, I may renew in the now aged Republic a beauteous custom of its flourishing youth. And here, not as a matter of vain boasting, but for the sake of the truth, I venture to relate that at one and the same time, a year or so ago, I was invited both to Rome and to Paris, rivalling each other in their invitations to receive this honor—to Rome by the Senate that was then in office and by certain noblemen of Rome, some of whom are present in this gathering, and to Paris by that excellent man and Master, Robert, Chancellor of the University of Paris, and by other well-known men of that city and that university. And although I hesitated for a time because of the present fame of that university, I finally decided to come hither—why, I ask you, if not for the very reason that Virgil gives, *Vicit amor patriae.*[12] I was much moved also toward this decision by a certain affection and reverence for those ancient poets of excellent genius who flourished in this very city, who lived here, who are buried here—even as Cicero well says in the second book of his *Laws:* "I regard this as a sound reason for your coming here by preference and for your loving this place," and continuing: "Our emotions are somehow stirred in those places in which the feet of those whom we love and admire have trodden. Wherefore even Athens delights us not so much through its magnificent buildings and its exquisite works of ancient art as through the memory of its great men: 'twas here they dwelt, 'twas here they sat, 'twas here they engaged in their philosophical discussions. And with reverence I contemplate their tombs."[13] This, I confess, was not the least of the causes for my coming to Rome. But whatever the cause, I trust that my coming, because of the novelty of the occasion if for no other reason, may serve to bring some glory to this city, to the city whence I come, and to all Italy.

On the second point, namely the charm of personal glory, many and various things might be said which for the sake of my promised brevity I shall pass over. Let this one truth suffice: that the desire for glory is innate not merely in the generality of men but in greatest measure in those who are of some wisdom and some excellence. Hence it is that although many philosophers have much to say in contempt of glory, few or none can be found who really condemn it. Which is shown most clearly by the fact that "they have inscribed their names at the beginning of the very works they have written in contempt of glory," as Cicero says in the first book of the *Tusculans*. Consider also what he said in this very hall in the presence of Julius Caesar: "You will not deny that you crave glory most eagerly."[14] Is there any need of further quotations? Most true is that which Cicero says elsewhere: "There is hardly anyone who after the completion of a laborious task or the meeting of perils does not desire glory as a reward for what he has accomplished."[15] True also are these lines of Ovid: *Excitat auditor studium, laudataque virtus / crescit, et immensum gloria calcar habet.*[16]

To join the first point and the second, let me now quote in its entirety that line of Virgil

[12] "Love of his fatherland has conquered" (*Aeneid* VI.823).

[13] *Laws* II.2.

[14] *Oration for Marcus Marcellus*, 8.

[15] *Offices* XIX.

[16] "The thought of the listener excites the toiling writer; excellence grows when it is praised; and the thought of glory is a powerful spur" (*Epistles from Pontus* IV.2, 35–36).

the first half of which I have already quoted: *Vicit amor patriae laudumque immensa cupido.*[17]

As to the third point, namely the stimulation of the activity of others, I will say only this: while there are some who think it shameful to follow in the footsteps of others, there are far more who fear to essay a hard road unless they have a sure guide. Many such men I have known, especially in Italy: learned and gifted men, devoted to the same studies, thirsting with the same desires, who as yet—whether from a sense of shame, or from sluggishness, or from diffidence, or, as I prefer to think, from modesty and humility—have not entered upon this road. Boldly, therefore, perhaps, but—to the best of my belief—with no unworthy intention, since others are holding back I am venturing to offer myself as guide for this toilsome and dangerous path; and I trust that there may be many followers.

So then the triple difficulty is overcome by its triple opposite. And I do not deny that in the struggle I have had the advantage of a certain genius given to me from on high by the giver of all good things, by God himself—that God who may rightly be called, in the words of Persius, *Magister artis ingenique largitor.*[18]

II

Now, since with God's help I have in some fashion come through the opposing difficulties to the desired goal, it remains for me to express the hope that I may receive a reward for all my labors. But I judge it fitting that before I close I should say something as to the nature of the profession of poetry, and as to the character of the reward that is desired.

With regard to the first of these matters a few words will suffice. You must know, illustrious sirs, that the office and the profession of the poet are not by any means what they are commonly believed to be. For as Lactantius says so well in the first book of his *Institutes:* "They know not the limits of poetic license or how far they may go in fictional composition. For the office of the poet consists in this, that he should take things that have really come to pass and transform them by means of subtle figures[19] into things of a different sort. To make up all that one writes is to be a fool and a liar rather than a poet." Whence Macrobius, in the second book of his commentary on the sixth book of the *Republic:* "And they maintain that Homer, the fount and source of all divine inventions, was setting truth before the wise under the cloud of a poetic fiction when he spoke of Jove as going to the ocean with the other gods, that is, with the stars, to attend a feast to which the Ethiops had invited him. They maintain that by this fabulous image Homer meant to signify that the stars draw their nourishment from the ocean. And he represents the Ethiop kings as participants in the feast of the gods because none dwell on the ocean shores save the Ethiops, whose nearness to the sun has burned them into the semblance of blackness."

It would take me too long to discourse upon this theme; but if time were not lacking and I did not fear to weary you I could readily prove to you that poets under the veil of fictions have set forth truths physical, moral, and historical—thus bearing out a statement I often make, that the difference between a poet on the one hand and a historian or a moral or physical philosopher on the other is the same as the difference between a clouded sky and a clear sky, since in each case the same light exists in the object of vision, but is perceived in different degrees according to the capacity of the observers. Poetry, furthermore, is all the sweeter since a truth that must be sought out with some care gives all the more delight when it is discovered. Let this suffice as a statement not so much about myself as about the poetic profession. For while poets are wont to find pleasure in a certain playfulness, I should not wish to appear to be a poet and nothing more.

[17] "Love of his fatherland has conquered, and the immense desire for praise."

[18] "Master of the arts and bestower of genius" (*Satires*, Prologue, 10).

[19] The Latin words are *obliquis figurationibus.*

III

It remains for me now to speak of the reward for which, however undeservingly, I hope.

The poet's reward is beyond question multiple, for it consists, firstly, in the charm of personal glory, of which enough has been said already, and secondly, in the immortality of one's name. This immortality is itself twofold, for it includes both the immortality of the poet's own name and the immortality of the names of those whom he celebrates. Concerning the first of these two kinds of immortality Ovid speaks with assurance at the end of the *Metamorphoses: Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis / nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas*,[20] and so on to the end. So also Statius at the end of the *Thebaid:*

Durabisne procul dominoque legere superstes,
O mihi bissenos multum vigilata per annos
Thebai?[21]

Of the second kind of immortality Virgil speaks thus in his ninth book:

Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,
nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo,
dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
accolet imperiumque pater romanus habebit.[22]

So also Statius in the *Thebaid: Vos quoque sacrati, quamvis mea carmina surgant / inferiore lyra, memores superabitis annos.*[23] And of both kinds together Lucan speaks in his ninth book: *Venturi me teque legent, Pharsalia nostra / vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabitur aevo.*[24]

There have indeed been many men who in their lifetime were glorious and memorable for what they wrought in writings or in arms, whose names have nevertheless fallen into oblivion for this one reason, that they did not succeed in expressing in the stable and enduring style of a true man of letters what it was that they really had in their minds and spirits. For as Cicero says in the first book of the *Tusculans:* "It may happen that a man may think rightly and yet be unable to express effectively what he thinks, or to attract the reader by any charm. To fail thus is to make poor use of leisure and of letters." Many mighty men and warriors, and others who have deserved eternal memory have passed into oblivion simply because they had not the good fortune to be recorded by capable authors, as Horace says so well in his *Odes:*

Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona
multi; sed omnes inlacrimabili
nocte premuntur,

and the reason follows: *carent quia vate sacro.*[25] Certain illustrious men, foreseeing such a possibility, have kept poets with them and held them in high honor, so that there might be someone who would hand down their praises to posterity—a matter carefully set forth by Cicero in his oration for Aulus Licinius Archias, to which I have already referred. Nor is it

[20] "And now I have finished my work, which neither the wrath of Jove nor fire nor sword nor the ravages of time can destroy" (xv.871–872).

[21] "Wilt thou long endure and be read, surviving thine author, oh my *Thebaid*, whereon for twelve long years I have toiled through the night watches?" (xii.811–813).

[22] "Fortunate are ye both! If my verses have any power, no day shall ever cancel you from the memory of the ages, as long as the progeny of Aeneas dwells on the unshakable rock of the Capitol, and the Roman father holds imperial sway" (*Aeneid* ix.446–449).

[23] "You too, now consecrate, shall survive the unforgetting years, even though my songs rise from a less lofty lyre" (x.445–446).

[24] "Posterity shall read of me and thee; and our *Pharsalia* shall live, and shall not by any age be condemned to oblivion" (ix.985–986).

[25] "Many mighty men lived before Agamemnon, but all are buried in a tearless night . . . since they lack an inspired bard" (iv.9, 25–28).

to be wondered at if famous warriors have held famous poets dear, according to Claudian's rule: *Gaudet enim virtus testes sibi iungere Musas; / carmen amat quisquis carmine digna gerit.*[26] And in so far as mundane glory is concerned the saying of Horace is certainly true: *Paulum sepultae distat inertiae / celata virtus.*[27] Hence comes that famous exclamation of Alexander of Macedon, of whom it is related that when he came to the tomb of Achilles he sighed, and said: "Oh fortunate youth, that didst find so great a herald for thy valor!"—referring to Homer, the prince of poets, who is known to have conferred fame upon Achilles by his noble songs.[28]

Other rewards, also, come to poets; but passing over these I come to the laurel crown. This crown, the due reward of Caesars and of poets, is a wreath made of the leaves of the laurel—though the poet's crown is sometimes made of myrtle and sometimes of ivy and is sometimes a simple fillet, variations which I have brought into one of my epistles in these two lines: *Nunc tamen et lauri mirtusque hedereque silentur, / sacraque temporibus debita vitta tuis.*[29]

And now, lest I continue at too great length, I shall treat briefly of the properties of the laurel.

The laurel, first of all, is fragrant, as our own senses tell us, as does Virgil in the sixth of the *Aeneid: Inter odoratum lauri nemus,*[30] and in the second Eclogue of his *Bucolics: Et vos, o lauri, carpam et te, proxima myrte, / sic positae quoniam suaves miscetis odores.*[31] This first property we may take to signify the fragrance of good repute which both Caesars and poets seek; also, that as we consist of both body and spirit, two ways of seeking glory are set before us, namely the way of the body and the way of the spirit—though in this life each needs the help of the other. Nor is there any doubt that Caesars strive toward glory by the first of these two ways, and poets by the second. So then, since both Caesars and poets move toward the same goal, though by different paths, it is fitting that one and the same reward be prepared for both, namely, a wreath from a fragrant tree, symbolizing the fragrance of good fame and of glory.

In the second place, the laurel tree is shady, and affords a resting place for those who labor. Whence come the lines of Horace in his 44th *Ode: Spissa ramis laurea fervidos / excludet ictus solis,*[32] and in his 46th: *Longaque fessum militia latus / depone sub lauru mea.*[33] Not inappropriately is this property of the laurel associated with Caesars and with poets: for it may symbolize the rest that is in store for the former after their toils in warfare, and for the latter after their toils in study.

It is said that the leaves of this tree are not only themselves incorruptible, but preserve from corruption also those books and other things on which they are placed: which is singularly appropriate for poets, whose work serves assuredly to preserve from corruption both their own fame and the fame of others.

The laurel is moreover a sacred tree, to be held in awe, and to be reverenced. Whence Virgil, in the seventh book of the *Aeneid: Laurus erat tecti medio in penetralibus altis, / sacra*

[26] "For valor delights to win alliance with the Muses: he loves song whose deeds are worthy of song" (*On the Consulate of Stilicho* III.5–6).

[27] "There is little difference between buried indolence and hidden excellence" (*Odes* IV.9, 29–30).

[28] This anecdote is derived from Cicero's *Oration for Archias*, 24.

[29] "But laurel now and myrtle and ivy are still, and the sacred fillet that your brows should bear." The poem from which these two lines are quoted is not otherwise known.

[30] "Within a fragrant laurel grove" (VI.658).

[31] "And you, oh laurels, I will pluck, and thee, myrtle, therewith, since thus combined ye mingle sweet fragrances" (II.54–55).

[32] "The thickly-branched laurel will shut out the hot shafts of the sun" (II.15, 9–10).

[33] "Rest under my laurel tree thy body wearied with long campaigning" (II.7,18–19).

comam multosque metu servata per annos.[34] Beside the laurel they were wont to erect altars, as is indicated in the second book of the *Aeneid:*

> *Aedibus in mediis nudoque sub aetheris axe*
> *ingens ara fuit iuxtaque veterrima laurus,*
> *incumbens arae.*[35]

It was appropriate for the service of sacrifice, whence Virgil in the third book of the *Aeneid: Phoebique sacerdos / vittis et sacra redimitus tempora lauro,*[36] and Lucan in his sixth book: *Unde et Thessalicae veniunt ad Pythia laurus.*[37] It is an adornment, moreover, not for temples only but for the Capitol itself, as Lucan says in his first book: *Sacras poscunt Capitolia laurus.*[38] The day would fail me if I should continue with quotations. In many other instances, indeed, the laurel is equally appropriate for Caesars and for poets, since I could show that both were wont to be called sacred—were I not mindful of Cicero's remark that evidence is superfluous in a case in which there is no ground for doubt.

There remain three properties possessed by the laurel that cannot be passed over in silence. The first is this, that when a person who is asleep is touched with laurel his dreams come true. Which makes it singularly appropriate for poets, who are said to be wont to sleep upon Parnassus, as Persius has it: *Nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnaso*[39] and the rest. This is said covertly to show that truth is contained in poetic writings which to the foolish seem to be but dreams—the poet's head being wreathed with the leaves that make dreams come true. It is appropriate in another respect also, for in so far as it promises foreknowledge of the future it is fitting for Apollo as the god of prophecy—whence, as I shall say presently, he is feigned to have loved the laurel tree. Accordingly, since Apollo was held to be the god of poets, it is no wonder that deserving poets were crowned with the very leafage of their own god, whom they regarded as their sustaining helper, whom they called the god of genius.

The second of these last three qualities of the laurel is its eternal verdure, with reference to which someone has well said: "Winter harms not the laurel, even as the pyre harms not gold."[40] . . . it is said to be beloved by Apollo and sacred to him. Whence Virgil says in the *Bucolics: Formosae myrtus Veneri, sua laurea Phoebo,*[41] and again in the seventh book of the *Aeneid: Quam pater inventam, primas dum conderet arces, / ipse ferebatur Phoebo sacrasse Latinus.*[42] And this gave rise to the story that Apollo loved Daphne, for according to Uguiccione[43] the Greek word *daphne* has the same meaning as the Latin *laurus:* this story may be read in full in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. Nor is this poetic fiction without a basis, for though every tree is dear to the sun, from which all life and growth descend, the one tree that is adorned with an eternal verdure most worthily holds the title of the loved one. And the immortality of this verdure, which symbolizes the immortality of fame sought through warfare or through genius, was perhaps a reason why both Caesars and poets were crowned most usually with a laurel wreath.

[34] "There was a laurel tree in the midst of the palace, in a high inner court, sacred in its leafage, and reverently guarded for many years" (VII.59–60).

[35] "In the midst of the palace, under the open sky, there was a great altar, and beside it an ancient laurel tree overhanging the altar" (II.512–514).

[36] "A priest of Apollo, his brows bound with fillets and the sacred laurel" (III.80–81).

[37] "Whence the laurels of Thessaly are brought to the Pythian games" (VI.409).

[38] "The Capitol calls for the sacred laurel" (I.287).

[39] "Nor to have slept on twin-peaked Parnassus" (Prologue, 2–3).

[40] The single MS. of the oration is defective at this point.

[41] "To lovely Venus the myrtle, to Apollo his own laurel" (VII.62).

[42] "Which Father Latinus, it is said, found while he was building the first citadel, and consecrated to Apollo" (VII.61–62).

[43] The 12th-century lexicographer, Uguiccione of Pisa.

The third and last of these properties is this: that, as all agree who have written on natural history, the laurel is immune to lightning. A great and notable prerogative! And this—to continue as we began—was the hidden reason why this tree . . .[44] for in the affairs of men what thunderbolt is more terrible than the diuturnity of time, which consumes all the works of men, all their possessions, all their fame? Rightly, therefore, since the laurel fears not the thunderbolt, is a crown of laurel given to those whose glory fears not the ages that like a thunderbolt lay all things low.

You have heard the considerations that have occurred to me without long meditation and, as it were, on the spur of the moment. The fact that Caesars and poets were indeed crowned with laurel could be proved by innumerable testimonies, and for each by separate declarations. As to Caesars, Horace speaks sufficiently in his 40th *Ode: Cui laurus aeternos honores / Dalmatico peperit triumpho.*[45] As to poets, Statius in the *Thebaid: Tempus erit, cum laurigero tua fortior oestro / facta canam.*[46] And as to both together, Statius in the *Achilleid: Cui geminae florent vatumque ducumque / certatim laurus.*[47]

Much might still be said as to the origins of poetry, the kinds and varieties of poets, and other related and very interesting matters: but the greater the attention you give me, the more careful I must be not to impair it by excessive speaking, nor to offend thereby your patient ears.

Thus then I conclude. Whether the first two kinds of reward shall come to me, God and my fortune know; you too shall know, my lords and friends; they too shall know who are still unborn, whose judgment will be, I hope, the surer and the more equitable since, as Cicero says, "They will judge without love or partiality, and without hatred or envy."[48] But however I may fare with regard to those two awards, the third award, namely the poet's laurel crown, I humbly seek to receive at your hands, illustrious Senator.[49] To you also there have been conveyed the requests, in this regard, of the most illustrious King of Sicily,[50] by whose high and profound judgment I, though unworthy, have been approved—to whom, moreover, by ancient custom the power of approval has been entrusted by the Roman people.

ERNEST H. WILKINS

Newton Centre, Mass.

[44] The MS. is defective at this point.

[45] "For whom the laurel won eternal honors by thy Dalmatian triumph" (II.1, 15–16).

[46] "A time will come when, stronger through an inspiration laurel-wreathed, I shall sing of thy deeds" (I.32–33).

[47] "For whom the twin laurels of poet and warrior flourish in rivalry" (I.15–16).

[48] *Oration for Marcus Marcellus*, 9.

[49] At this point Petrarch is addressing directly his friend Orso dell' Anguillara, one of the two Roman Senators then in office.

[50] Robert II of Anjou, King of Naples and Sicily, who a few days earlier had given Petrarch a three-day oral examination, at the end of which he had pronounced him qualified to receive the laurel crown.